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## ABSTRACT

Leisure is a function of the individual's interaction with the environment, both social and physical. The sense of freedom from obligation (or the "leisure experience"), and the context in which this experience might take place, differ significantly from person to person. These factors depend on each person's individual background and socialization history. These complexities must be taken into account in educating for leisure. A set of moral principles and values needs to be examined, and a new leisure ethic developed. (Author/JD)

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LEISURE EDUCATION: A SERIOUS TASK,  
NOT SELF-DELUSION NOR CHILD'S PLAY

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LEISURE EDUCATION: A SERIOUS TASK,  
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About a month ago I was asked to address the National Forum on Leisure Counseling with comments on and criticisms of the state of the art of leisure counseling. I chose as the title of my address "Leisure counseling theory and practice: different goals require different approaches" (Neulinger, 1979). I just became aware of the similarity of the first part of this title to the just published work by Mundy and Odum (1979), Leisure education: theory and practice. I only received their book this week. I may, however, have been influenced unconsciously by their title, since I knew of the book's forthcoming and had included it among the references in my next opus.

Why this elaboration? Because the Mundy and Odum book has helped shape the form of this present address. First, it confirms the need to repeat at least part of what I had expressed in my previous address. Second, it forces me into the unfortunate position of having to play the role of a severe critic. And third, it leads me to restate some of the essentials involved in leisure education, as I see it.

Theory versus Practice

A theory is a certain way of interrelating ideas. It involves abstract concepts, their interrelationships, and links to observable facts or the world of reality. The primary goal of a theory is to illuminate the order in the universe. Theories deal with the "pure"

aspect of science: understanding.

Practice implies the application of science, but not necessarily only of science. Theoretical knowledge is now used for a purpose, to serve a client. The goal of practice is to help the client achieve a goal, his or her goal. Understanding may be part of that goal, but it may not. And even if it is, the nature of what is to be understood is likely to be different from what the theoretician is concerned with.

The goal of the theory of leisure education is to identify relevant variables (both conceptually and operationally), explore and illuminate their interrelationships, lead us to an understanding of the issues involved in the domain of leisure, and develop the knowledge, skills and techniques that enable us to predict and if desirable, control behavior.

The goal of the practice of leisure education is to help clients improve the quality of their lives, as they relate to the domain of leisure. Achieving this goal will involve the conveying of knowledge, but this knowledge will consist of two different types. There are two kinds of knowing: indirect and direct knowledge; hearing or reading about something and experiencing it. We all know the difference, and we all know that there are thus two kinds of obtaining knowledge, but also two kinds of knowledge obtained!

The theoretician moves in the world of indirect knowledge, although he/she will attempt to experience as much direct knowledge as possible, both as the source of the germination as well as the

ultimate base for the verification of theories. However, the very way of the coming about of direct knowledge, involving feelings and emotions, may include aspects that are not translatable into language. To that degree, the experience may be tremendously useful to the theoretician, but not to the theory, until translated.

The client, on the other hand, may benefit immensely by such experiences. He/she needs not translate them into language, but can respond directly as a function of them. In short, the practitioner may wish to make use of approaches that involve experiential phenomena and quite appropriately so. Conceptual clarity and other such considerations become irrelevant and unimportant for the goal desired: helping the client. But when the practitioner turns around and starts writing text books, he/she becomes a theoretician. Communication (of the indirect kind) is now one of the major goals and conceptual clarity becomes a fundamental requirement.

I have elaborated on the need for conceptual clarity extensively elsewhere (Neulinger, 1974; 1976a; in press). I want to illustrate some of the issues raised in the light of the Mundy and Odum (1979) book, one, because this work is likely to have a considerable impact on the present leisure education scene, and two, because I am presented in that book as aligning myself with a theoretical position which is just about the opposite of everything I espouse (p. 6).

### Leisure Education from a "time frame of reference"

It is not necessary that we agree on how to define leisure; it is necessary, however, that as theoreticians we make it clear what we denote by the term and that we accept the implications of our choice. We may well choose to equate leisure with free or discretionary time, but once we have done so we have committed ourselves to a certain orientation and its consequences.

There are many issues and problems that might fall within a time frame reference of leisure education. Questions raised might be the following: do we have enough free time; too much of it; should society aim toward providing more or less of it; what do we do in our free time; do we use our free time to our best advantage; to society's best advantage; does society provide enough and optimal opportunities for the use of free time; what is a good use of free time. And once again, what do we even mean by free time or leisure?

We cannot escape that last question. If we are consistent with the discretionary time definition of leisure (i.e., a sociological framework), we must specify certain time periods within the person's life for which leisure is not relevant. Traditionally, such time periods have been seen as time spent on the job, during sleep, and while engaged in other activities relating to so called existence and subsistence needs. Our frame of reference, within that context, is not the person but time; more specifically, leisure is defined by the way society or certain societal obligations delineate given periods of time within the person's life cycle.

If we take this time frame reference for leisure seriously, does it make sense to proclaim as the basic premises of leisure education the following:

1. The essence of leisure is freedom; ...
2. The leisure experience is a uniquely individual experience; ... (Mundy & Odum, 1979, p. 4).

The very concepts freedom and experience suggest a psychological orientation and are in direct contradiction to a time frame of reference. They indicate that our concern is not with free time but with providing the conditions that will turn an activity (any activity) into one where we experience freedom. It becomes clear that free time, in itself, is not the sufficient condition for leisure. And I may add, as I elaborate on elsewhere, it is not even a necessary condition for leisure (Neulinger, in press).

I agree that

It would be a mistake to engage recipients of leisure education in semantic exercises and professional-philosophic controversies over the definition of leisure or talk with first-grade children and the public in general on leisure being a subjective, qualitative state of mind (Mundy & Odum, 1979, p. 2).

That, however, does not imply that leisure professionals ought to communicate with each other at first-grade levels. The distinction between theory and practice becomes relevant again.

Furthermore, and this is the most important issue, the need for a psychological conception of leisure is not something that some theoreticians have dogmatically pronounced, but rather it is a fact that has arisen from the changed conditions in our society. It is the very conditions that call for leisure education.<sup>1</sup>

The astonishing thing is that authors who so clearly work within a psychological frame work of leisure, insist on calling it something else. One final example will do:

Any experience one has in leisure can be viewed as or called a leisure experience if it is perceived as such. The individual's perceptions in the final analysis are the ultimate criteria for the person involved in the experience (Mundy & Odum, 1979, p. 75).

If this does not represent a psychological frame of reference, I do not know what would. And would it not be more veridical, if the statement were to read:

Any experience can be viewed as or called a leisure experience if it is perceived as such.

This would avoid the inconsistency inherent in the original statement, and direct attention to the conditions that bring about such a perception.

Now let us take a brief look at the two basic approaches to educating for leisure - the extrinsic and the intrinsic determination of leisure behavior and values, as seen by Mundy & Odum (1979). Following are some of the terms used to describe either.

Extrinsic determination is said to "focus upon instilling a predetermined set of leisure values and attitudes...", "... that there are universal leisure attitudes, values, behaviors, and tastes that are needed if one is to gain the full benefits of leisure." ... "... the approach for transmitting these predetermined 'sets' is through moralizing, inculcation, indoctrination, and persuasion."

Intrinsic determination, on the other hand, is seen as "facilitating each person's ability to think through, evaluate, and make his or her own leisure choices and decisions, as well as to understand the impact of these choices on his or her individual life, others, and on society." Three basic approaches may be used: "(1) maintaining a laissez-faire attitude, (2) modeling, and (3) active facilitation." And so on.

Aside from presenting this dichotomy in a biased manner (through the use of loaded terms, which by the way would be understandable if the authors had a set of values to promote!), it reflects an extremely naive view of human behavior. It assumes that each person develops and holds values and attitudes independently of the society he or she lives in. It does not take into account the constant and inescapable interaction of the person and the environment, nor does it admit of society's role and necessary obligation in the socialization process.

Identifying me with the so called extrinsic determination method is associated with my saying that leisure education is "... a conscious systematic effort to bring about an attitude

favorable toward leisuring ..." (Neulinger, 1974, p. 158). The authors overlook the fact that leisuring is defined on the same page as engaging "in an activity freely, without compulsion either from outside forces or inner neurotic drives." I admit that I am all for indoctrinating people to engage in such behavior. I do not agree that such behavior would be extrinsically determined.

Beware of the professional who professes that "no profession can justify teaching or imparting their own set of values, attitudes, and behavior to others - ..." (Mundy & Odum, 1979, pp. 8-9), particularly if that person is an educator or a member of a helping profession.<sup>2</sup>

#### Leisure Education from a "state of mind" viewpoint

Leisure education, from a time frame of reference, had its true origin not with the publication of The Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education (1918) and its seventh principle relating to the "... worthy use of leisure time," but with the nineteenth century struggles of the labor movement and unions to assure at least a modicum of free time to the laboring masses. Leisure education in that sense required a hard struggle; it meant taking on big business and often the government itself, which tended to be on the side of business. It implied an unavoidable involvement in politics.

Leisure education, from a state of mind viewpoint, will require an equally hard struggle. Once more, it will engage us in a confrontation with big business and possibly, government itself.

And once more, it will involve us in politics to the core of our being.<sup>3</sup>

Leisure education faces the task of dealing with the impact on human life styles of the changes taking place as our society shifts into a post-industrial era. This is the exciting challenge that we, as a new discipline, must be willing to accept. Education has both an informational and a motivational component, but the prime emphasis is on information. Leisure education, thus, implies foremost the imparting of knowledge: knowledge that is relevant to the leisure domain, as it pertains to the individual, to the individual's immediate environment, and to society at large.

To the degree that our knowledge is frequently embedded in and intertwined with our attitudes, as their cognitive component, it implies that leisure education will be closely related to a process of attitude change (Neulinger, 1976b). To the degree that a substantial proportion of leisure education content may consist of the explication of new and now more appropriate and adaptive attitudes and norms, this attitude change process may become particularly relevant to leisure counseling.

Let us take a brief look at what knowledge is relevant in terms of the individual, the individual's environment, and society at large.

The Individual. The primary task of leisure education, at present, is to make the individual aware of what is meant by leisure within the context of leisure education. We must overcome the free time/leisure confusion that is so deeply embedded

in all of our thinking. Once again, I disagree with Mundy and Odum (1979, p. 1.) about their statement that "leisure education ... is aimed at people outside of the leisure field." As a matter of fact, the authors disagree with themselves. Toward the end of their book they stress that "future leisure education facilitators need to go through a personal leisure education process themselves (p. 213, italics in the original). I thoroughly agree with that statement, and have made similar ones myself.

Clarifying the meaning of leisure does not imply getting involved with the recipients of leisure education in sophisticated definitional analyses. It means helping the individual identify the conditions that bring about the state of leisure, which in terms of my particular viewpoint are perceived freedom and intrinsic motivation. Others may wish to add other dimensions, or change them altogether. That is not the issue. The important point is that we help to identify the conditions that bring about meaning in life, a state which may well be the criterion of the quality of life, and which has long since been described best as leisure.

The Individual's Environment or Personal Setting. Leisure emerges as a function of the individual's interaction with the environment, both social and physical. People differ in what they perceive as freedom or as to what they perceive as intrinsically motivating. These factors will depend on each person's individual background and socialization history. The issues involved are too complex to be discussed here in detail. Let it suffice to stress that we cannot educate for or about leisure

without taking all these complexities into account. A set of moral principles and values will need to be examined, and indeed, a new leisure ethic developed. But these values and attitudes cannot and should not be forced unto anyone; they will only take roots if they develop out of a recognition of their usefulness and appropriateness to our changing society. Leisure education has the task of making people aware of the conditions that make these new values necessary.

Society at large. Actually, our discussion has already moved into the sphere of society at large. A norm, a new leisure ethic, is not something that any one individual creates; it is the shared feeling and standards of many. A viable society must have norms that are in line with the conditions of the times. The task of leisure education is to examine the appropriateness of our norms, in the light of changing conditions. We may find that some of our most deeply embedded habits and values have become dysfunctional. For example, to name just one: our consumption habits may need considerable revisions not only in the light of available resources, but in terms of what gives meaning to life. It is in such an instance that leisure educators may find themselves in direct confrontation with the interests of big business. It is for similar reasons that leisure educators may have to turn into politicians.

Leisure education is not a simple task. It faces the challenges of our rapidly changing society and must confront newly emerging values and norms. Its methods and techniques remain to be developed; its goal is clear: examine and question the nature of the good life, and then promote it.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> This is not the place to elaborate on this point. The reader will find a discussion of this point in To leisure: an introduction (Neulinger, in press).

<sup>2</sup> For those interested in the issue of value expression in the formulation of scientific theories, I recommend an article by Kenneth J. Gergen, "Toward generative theory," from which I quote the following:

... regardless of the traditional attempt to remain ethically neutral, the social theorist is inevitably favoring certain forms of social activity over others, certain strata of society as opposed to others, and certain values over their antitheses.

... The theorist need not fear the expression of values in a given formulation; they are inevitable (Gergen, 1978, pp. 1355 - 1356).

<sup>3</sup> The following remarks, with modifications, are taken from a section on leisure education, in To leisure: an introduction (Neulinger, in press).

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